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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON LEBANESE ASSASSINATION

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, December 13, focuses on reports about the assassination of Lebanese MP Gebran Tueni in Lebanon yesterday. All reports highlight international condemnation of the crime, including Jordan's denunciation.

Editorial Commentary

-- "No conspiracy theorists"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (12/13) editorializes: "If these attacks are aimed at silencing the loudest critics of Damascus, they are obviously counterproductive. After each bombing, Lebanese opposition against Syria grows louder and more effective, more and more people take to the streets, international support for the Lebanese grows, the language of the international community against Damascus rings harsher and harsher, and Syria finds itself even further isolated. The criminals who are orchestrating all these attacks are definitely doing Syria no favor. Still, this is no time for conspiracy theories. Only backward elements, sad dinosaurs entrenched behind a long-gone cold war mentality and naive enough to think that anyone could believe them in this 21st century of ours, would point the finger at their usual suspects: the Zionist enemy, imperialist America, or both.. The Mehliis report had already put Syria in an extremely grave situation. Yesterday's attack lays the ground for more suspicions against certain Damascus circles. It is in everyone's interest that Damascus comes out clean, and only hard facts - and not empty rhetoric - will achieve that."

-- "Gebran's assassination and the other face of terrorism"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (12/13): "Everything is possible and all conclusions are legitimate in this case of terrorism that does not bear the identity of Al-Qaeda" and that "security in Lebanon has become exposed in a serious manner and that the bloody game on its territories continues either to serve Lebanese internal conflicts or to serve regional and international purposes seeking to expand the circle of instability in the lands between Iraq and the Mediterranean".

-- "Gebran Tueni . and the episodes continue"

Daily columnist Urayb Rantawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (12/13): "From their standpoint, the killers manage the killing game among the parties, the sects and the media organizations at the beat of the investigation and Mehliis' reports. They think that the more they shed Lebanese blood, the more they wreak havoc in Lebanon's social matrix, and hence the more their chances are of escaping the grip of justice. They killed whoever 'moaned' about the guardianship in the past, then they killed whoever called for the truth and for investigation, and now they prepare to kill whoever calls for international justice. They are used to having their crimes, their mass graves, their assassinations and their killings be forgotten and overtaken by the lapse of time. One can only respond to these people by adhering to the truth and to the investigation. One can only avenge Tueni and his predecessors and successors by handing the killers over to an international court."

-- "Assassination of Gebran Tueni a typical detonator!"

Daily columnist George Haddad writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (12/13): "Without a doubt, the assassination of Tueni

in this manner will re-ignite what Bush and Rice had called 'the revolution of the cedars' in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination when the days and months were sufficient to cool it down and to put its fires. That "revolution of the cedars" did not succeed in achieving its objectives. That revolution, although, with international pressure, succeeded in effecting Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, it failed and continues to fail in achieving its other objectives, namely the disarmament of the Lebanese, Islamic and Palestinian resistance. Furthermore, from the perspective of the cedars rebels, the international investigation . could not come up with any conclusive evidence that would prove the pre-set charges and accusations. This failure increased doubts and created more difficulties for directing the investigation in the targeted direction, which in turn made it difficult to charge a specific party with the assassination of Hariri in a manner that would make pursuing and besieging that party with unjust international decision acceptable and permissible and even a form of justice. Thus came the media leaks from Paris and Washington that the Security Council is going to extend the investigation another six months only in order to finalize it with entertaining the idea of imposing sanctions on the suspected Syrians. Such a development means only one thing: the objectives behind the Hariri assassination, with all accompanied instigations, repercussions, rumors, divisions, alliances, explosions and instability, reached the maximum and were still not accomplished. Under these circumstances, the planners who stand to benefit from the assassination crime had to think of something, an event, an assassination, that would breathe life into the dying fire that followed the Hariri assassination.. What does all this have to do with the assassination of Gebran Tuéni? We do not know, but what we do know is that Tuéni's assassination may be the new typical detonator that is designed to take the crime of Hariri's assassination back to square one, that to re-ignite the fire that was almost dying out".

-- "Investigation and international court"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back-page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (12/13): "What good is it to argue about who is behind the crime? One can easily say that targeting one of the most prominent opponents of Syria is a conspiracy to incriminate Syria . but for how long are the enemies of Syria going to keep on killing Syria's opponents in Lebanon? This is a difficult formula for the Lebanese to digest, particularly those who may be targeted. Let there be an international investigation then and let it be comprehensive and include yesterday's heinous crime and all the other crimes since the Hariri assassination. There is definite logic in the demand for a wide scale international investigation, and if Syria is innocent, then not even a thousand investigators can prove its involvement. Syria's political conduct towards Lebanon does not show any forgiveness or readiness to turn the page of hegemony and guardianship. The Syrian minister's remarks yesterday, reminding everyone that Lebanon was safe when Syria was there, is not good and evokes a sense of threat. Once again, we do not rule out the hypothesis that another party or intelligence system, including the Mossad, may be involved. But there is no solution to this situation other than seeking the help of the international community". HALE